

*This article originally appeared in the Chicago Sun-Times on October 12, 2010. Read the original [here](#).*

Five years ago, Ald. Tom Tunney (44th) tried to donate blood so his ten-year-old nephew could have surgery to remove a life-threatening brain tumor.

After driving an hour to the blood bank, filling out paperwork and waiting 45 minutes, Tunney was turned away because he's gay.

"It was very traumatic. I was kind of shocked. It wasn't just being a gay man. There were a lot of other restrictions I was clueless about. I said to myself, 'No wonder there's a blood shortage,'" Tunney recalled Tuesday.

"There was a call for blood. We wanted to do our part as a family. ... The embarrassing part was, you had to go back to your family, especially during a traumatic time, and say, 'I'm not eligible.' It is a poignant experience."

On Tuesday, the City Council's Health Committee approved a Tunney-sponsored resolution calling for the reversal of an antiquated federal policy that dates back to 1985, when the AIDS virus was "still a mystery."

The policy prohibits gay and bi-sexual men from ever donating blood while allowing men who've had sex with HIV-positive women to serve as blood donors after waiting one year.

U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley (D-Chicago), who's leading the charge for the policy change in Congress, said it makes no sense to allow promiscuous heterosexuals to donate blood, no questions asked, while banning gay men for life.

The current donor questionnaire asks, "Have you had sex with a man since 1977?" There are no questions about whether the would-be donor is monogamous or engages in safe sexual practices.

Referring to heterosexuals, Quigley said, "We treat those folks as low-risk, even if they have a new partner every single day. And that makes the blood supply unsafe and it's contradictory and unfair."

He added, "It's time to stop treating the LGBT community as a uniform demographic and

recognize that people in committed relationships who practice safe sex are not at a high risk for HIV and other [sexually-transmitted diseases]. Other nations, such as Spain and Italy, have adopted blood donation policies based on unsafe sexual activity — and so should we.”

Despite Tunney’s humiliating experience of being turned away as a blood donor, his nephew managed to get enough blood to have successful surgery to remove the brain tumor.

“He’s now playing football for Lincoln Park High School,” Tunney said.